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ABSTRACT

This speech evaluates some of the effects of sex-role stereotyping on both men and women. The results of a number of recent research studies are presented to chart some societal changes already evident in relation to sexism. In this context of change, the author deals with the nature of educational programming for young children which will counter sexism. The training of teachers of young children is discussed in regard to survey data on prospective teachers' self-evaluation and expression of attitudes on sex-role stereotyping. The implications of sexism, and the means used to challenge sexism, are discussed. (Author)

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Sexism and the Education of the Young Child

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What is "sexism"? How does it affect people in our society, male as well as female, young as well as old? What are the implications in educational programming for young children? What shall be the nature, degree, and direction of change? Who shall make such decisions? These questions will be considered,, but not all of them, at this point, can be answered.

"Sexism" is defined in the Barnhart Dictionary of New English Since 1963 as "discrimination based on a person's sex." For the purposes of this paper, the term sexism will be used to designate both legal and subtle societal forms of discrimination based on sex.

International Women's Year

It seems especially appropriate at this time, during International Women's Year, that we reconsider future sex-role orientations in relation to women's roles in society. The main areas to which IWY is to be devoted are:

"(1) Promotion of equality between men and women; (2) Full integration of women in the total development effort especially emphasizing women's responsibility and important role in economic, social and cultural, development at the national, regional, and international levels, particularly during the Second Development Decade, and (3) Increase in the contribution of women to the development of friendly relations and cooperation among States, and to the strengthening of world peace." 31

The same United Nations bulletin describes a Draft plan which was presented at the World Population Conference on Aug. 30, 1974, at Bucharest, Rumania. This Plan calls for the education of girls as well as boys to be extended and diversified so that they might contribute more effectively in rural and urban sectors. The Plan relates recognition of the equal status of men and women in the family and in society to the full partnership in family planning, and

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thereby to smaller family size.

The schizophrenia engendered by the question of equality of the sexes is noted in two articles in the New York Times. One article, "U.N. Parley on Women Draws Support" describes the difficulty of raising money as well as ideological conflicts facing United Nations delegates.[30] Our perceptions and reactions are related to our own agendas. On the one hand, a delegate from Saudi Arabia expressed apprehension about the imposition of Western ideas of equality on the rest of the world, while a representative from Czechoslovakia promised support because the status of women was part of "the struggle for a new society without capitalistic exploitation and wars." Another New York Times article described President Ford creating a national commission to promote and coordinate U.S. participation in International Women's Year. While the U.S. government had earmarked $350,000 for this endeavor, it was noted that countries with far smaller populations had allocated $2 million each.[11] Put into this world framework it might indeed appear that, in Betty Yorburg's words, "The growth of the new women's movement is the result of an idea whose time has come."[32]

Women's movements seeking specific rights have functioned in the United States throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The suffragette movement, for one, has been well documented. Authors have placed such movements and women's differing roles in a historical, political, and socio-economic perspective. One such historical study describes differing expectations of women who must work from those whose life is based in home and family, as differentiated along class lines.[15]

From the point of view of economic determinism, the industrialization of modern society no longer requires large families with preferably male heirs, predominating. Women's rights and sex-role stereotyping have long been related

to economic cycles, and one wonders at the extent to which political support for the current Women's Liberation movement is related to post World War II years and a drive for population control. One also wonders if strides made by women today in political, legal, social, economic and educational spheres will be sustained should the present economic recession deepen and broaden.

Effects on Women Today

The argument concerning the roles played by biologists and psychoanalysts throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as opposed to theorists and practitioners who emphasize socio-cultural forces in sex-role stereotyping (the nature-nurture controversy) has been dealt with elsewhere.[28]

Women's rights and sex-role stereotyping have become issues of no small consequence within the past 15 years. With the advent of some of the writings of such women as Simone de Beauvoir,[5] Betty Friedan,[12] and Kate Millett,[24] the Women's Liberation movement came into being. However, much controversy still reigns.

The media frequently evidence such societal concern. Newspapers daily carry articles on problems still to be resolved (i.e. physically abused women presently unprotected from present or former husbands),[27] on documenting vistories (i.e. notification of the first man to be convicted and sentenced under New York State's new rape law),[2] new yet unresolved semi-victories (i.e. one of 11 women ordained to the Episcopal priesthood resigned because of lack of support from the vestry),[3] news of women going back to college, women working at hitherto male-dominated jobs, women bolstering each other through group sessions, women trying to find out who they really are.

Television has had special programs, from "Free To Be You and Me" to programs dealing with the personal question "What Is a Woman?", to a three hour program of exploration into the changes in the relations between the sexes, "Of Women and Men"

(two newspaper reviews written by men about the last program were negative about the content as well as style of production.)[26,13]

Periodicals vary, from frank discussion on lesbianism in Ms magazine, to a new magazine on women in athletics (Sports), to "Happy Homemakers" in Homemaker's magazine.[10] Other magazines are undergoing changes as they begin to address themselves to the new woman. Redbook magazine announced its new slogan as "Redbook: The Magazine of the New Management," and describes that it is evolutionizing along with young women.

Women's organizations have proliferated: National Organization for Women, Women's Equity Action League, Progressive Household Technicians, Women's Political Caucus, and National Black Feminist Organization, among others. A counterbalancing group, the Pussycats, consists of women who are concerned about the possibility that their societal roles might be changed.

Women and the Law

Sexism has been related to racism in American society by Myrdal, who perceives both "isms" being related to a paternalism which has become evident in the law.[25] Woman's physical function in procreation lies at the core of society's belief in her proper role, and forms the basis of her oppression, even though the idealized society of male and female sex-stereotype roles does not in actuality exist.[8] All men and women do not mayyr and live happily ever after, with women staying home to raise children. Divorce happens with great frequency; alimony and child support payments are infrequent or discontinued; women are frequently sole supporters of families.

Laws which might change some inequities for women are beginning to be enacted. The Supreme Court ruling lagalizing abortion has been a major step in women's rights. The previously noted newspaper article referring to the first man condemned for rape under the new law in New York State involved a change in

law which eliminated the requirement for corroboration of the victim's testimony.[2] The Supreme Court, "to support the argument that changing times call for different interpretations of law," ruled that women may not be denied equal opportunity to jury service. The implications are many in other areas, such as credit rating and alimony.[4] The Court's perception of women as the center of home and family life appears to have changed slightly. Prof. I. A. Powe, a law professor at University of Texas, has stated in an article in Women Law Reporter that he perceives members of the Burger court to be middle-class oriented, and that they are persuaded by the media's presentation of suburban women who are bored with homemaking and want to begin a career.[18]

The first federal law prohibiting sex discrimination among students became effective in Nov., 1971, with Titles VII and VIII of the Public Health Service Act. Title IX of the Education Amendments 1972 prohibits discrimination in federally assisted education programs against students and emplyees on the basis of sex. The implementation of the laws depends upon enforcement through law-suits.

The Equal Rights Amendment has been ratified (as of this writing) by 34 states (of which two states have rescinded, although these states may not be able to defend this action legally.) In order for this amendment to pass, it must be ratified by 38 states, "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex" is still not the law.

Effects on Men

Men have been affected in differing ways by the Women's Liberation movement. Brother, a monthly journal by and about men combatting the sexism in their lives,has been published. A regular feature page in a Czechoslovak weekly

publication is devoted to the downtrodden male, with burdens put upon him by liberated women. Books are being written by men who both praise and support the Women's movement, suggesting that men need to lose masculine mystiques for a better society, and discuss the contemporary conflict between the sexes with recognition of the need for both groups to work together for a viable solution to apparent problems.[13,9,29] Some men are still asking, as did Freud, "What do women want?" to be answered by a current radio spot commercial for an automobile, "Your job!"

Men, too, have difficulty counteracting sex-role stereotyping. Some occupations have been largely precluded to men by societal convention (i.e. those occupations involving nurturing), men are expected to stifle display of emotion, and are expected to bear the burden of financial support of family while attempting to maintain an image of strength.

Working Women and Ethnicity

Is the Women's Liberation Movement a product of the upper-middle class, and does it speak to the needs of women who work out of economic need? How does the current thrust for ethnicity interact with the Women's Movement? Levine and Herman suggest that part of the interest in ethnic identification arises out of the fact that Women's Liberation does not touch the issues of concern to the wives of steelworkers or bus drivers. The authors state that, "The return to 'our own people' might be explained in terms of blue-collar Americans reacting to this sense of rejection."[20] The need of women working in blue-collar jobs have only recently begun to be addressed. A conference sponsored by the Ford Foundation was held in December, 1974, at which time there was identified a need to establish a program of sex-role re-education to end the imprinting of sex-stereotypes on behaviors and on job classifications. One of the conference

participants, Alice Cook of Cornell University, said that " the life cycle of most working women included an entry, an exit and a re-entry into the work force."[1] Ms. Cook also stated that unless sex discrimination was eliminated at an early age, with text books rewritten and teachers retrained, as had been done in Sweden, it will be expected that women will continue to bear a double burden, that of work and housewifery. The American Teacher published some facts on women workers, some of which stated that 9 out of 10 women work outside the home at some time in their lives; three fifths of all women workers are single, widowed, divorced, or separated, or have husbands who earn less than $7,000 a year; the average woman worker earns less than three fifths of what a man does, even though she is slightly better educated (12.5 as opposed to 12.4 years of schooling); 1 out of 8 families is headed by a woman, almost 3 out of 10 black families are headed by women; of all women workers, 1 out of 10 is the head of a family, 1 out of 5 minority women workers heads a family.

A paper presented at the AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science) Meeting, Jan. 28, 1975, dealt with a virtually unexamined population exposed to conditions in the work place -- women.[16] Ms. Hunt states: "If we ask the question 'Is the offspring of the working mother at higher risk than that of the non-working mother?' we do not have an answer to apply to the United States in the year 1975." Of particular concern were women working in radiation and chemical industries.

The pluralistic aspect of society in the United States, urban areas in particular, presents some questions for the women's movement. The students enrolled in the School of Education at Brooklyn College, particularly in Early Childhood, are almost exclusively female. Since the college is part of CUNY (City University of New York), has no tuition charges or dormitory facilities,

and has an open admissions policy, the student population is drawn from a pluralistic, predominantly lower-middle class, non-college-educated urban population. The students in this author's classes in an undergraduate Performance-Based Teacher Education program work in pre-school settings (i.e. Day Care) and in primary classes (kindergarten - second grade) in inner city public elementary schools. Since the education of the young child who attends pre-school and school is to a significant extent dependent upon the teacher, it was decided to investigate the teachers'-in-training behavior and attitudes towards sexist practices in such educational settings.

Teacher Education Students

Students in three different sections of the Early Childhood program (all female, approximately 25 students each section) were asked to observe themselves in relation to a series of questions taken from the Feminist Press Resource Unit, and to write up an evaluation of what they actually said and did. Since the assignment was an addition to the regular course-work, was to be ungraded, and there were no "right answers," the responses were expected to be honest with few exceptions. The descriptions matched closely with observations made by faculty members of students in the classroom settings, except in those students who exhibited a generalized lack in the area of self-analysis. Students frequently reported surprise at their own roles in sex-role socialization. For example, one student stated,"If there are any secretarial tasks to be done, usually I select girls....Girls tend to be quieter and more well mannered when they are sent on errands. Boys run through the halls, scream and interrupt other teachers while they are talking. Girls usually wait quietly until the teacher recognizes them and speaks to them. After explaining how I choose children for this type of work, I seem to prefer 'the good girl!"

The students in these classes are almost entirely of ethnic and minority representation: Italian, Jewish, black and Puerto Rican, with an occasional WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) and Irish component. Ages vary from approximately 18 or 19 (college sophomores) to 40 years of age. Some mature women are paraprofessionals presently working in educational settings, as well as mothers who are returning to pursue their own careers as their children are growing up. All are the products of public and parochial education.

Women students with strong ethnic identities tended to state as their own opinions the belief that girls and boys should be socialized to differing roles, because "that is the way it is." Similar opinions were stated by Puerto Rican students, and some of the older black women. The latter stated that they had been "liberated" (meaning working) for a long time.

While this was not a statistically representative sample, and while the survey was an informal one, it is this author's impression, after teaching students in this same program for five years, that these classes were representative of this teacher-in-training population. Since Brooklyn College is one of the largest teacher education institutions in the country, and its graduates populate a significantly large number of schools in Brooklyn, the students' responses could be indicators of what might be future sexist trends in numerous public elementary and pre-school settings in the near future.

What significance do this informal survey and the students' opinions have for teacher education, and for the effects on the education of youn children? These results might be indicative of the fact that women from ethnic lower-class backgrounds who tend to pursue a career in teaching young children today would tend to be somewhat traditionally oriented in their own life goals. If true, then simply raising consciousness would be insufficient to effect change in either these future teachers or in their future pupils. We might the have to agree that the Womens' Liberation Movement does not yet speak to the lower-

middle, largely ethnic population, and that we still have a differentiation based on class. Recognizing this state of affairs, what do we do about it? Should anything be done? By whom? Who has the right or responsibility to attempt to effect change? Perhaps an examination of differences between the sexes at the stage of the young child is in order at this time.

The Children

What differences beside gender exist in boy and girl children? Research on male-female differences indicates some relative knowns and many uncertainties, with opposing findings being reported. Maccoby and Jacklin, in an article reporting the data in a compilation of known facts and myths, report the following.[22]

Differences:

1. Males are more aggressive than females.
2. Girls have greater verbal ability than boys, beginning to diverge at approximately 11 years of age. *
3. Boys excel in visual-spatial ability in adolescence and adulthood, not in childhood. *
4. Boys excel in mathematical ability, diverging at approximately ages 12 or 13. *

* The explanation of why these differences appear at puberty is, of course, unexplained. Is there some physiological time-table? Or is there cultural conditioning, with boys expected to excel in these areas, and girls expected to turn to other interests (i.e. cosmetics, hair care)?

Myths:

1. Girls are more "social" than boys.
2. Girls are more suggestible than boys.
3. Girls have lower self-esteem than boys, reporting different areas of self-confidence.
4. Girls lack motivation to achieve.
5. Girls are better at rote learning and simple repetitive tasks. Boys are better at high-level tasks that require them to inhibit previously learned responses.
6. Boys are more "analytic" than girls.
7. Girls are more affected by heredity, boys by environment.
8. Girls are "auditory", boys "visual."

The authors suggest other areas which are unclear and indicate mixed, even contradictory findings. Such areas are one year old children's play behavior, fears, preference for toys, proximity with mother, and levels of physical activity, as described in other research studies.[17,19,21,23] Additional research is clearly indicated, not only to establish which differences exist, but to attempt to understand which are controlled by culture.

What happens when pre-school children are placed in a non-sexist environment? By three years, children have well defined sex-role stereotyping, although three and four year olds are more flexible than fives. When the teacher encourages girls and boys to interact in play experiences, girls build with blocks alongside boys, and even build tall structures (contrary to Erikson.) In handling non-sexist terminology, children at first use traditional words (i.e. policeman), but applying words to new experiences (i.e. a visit from a

policewoman) begin to think in more accurate terms, in relation to their own experiences (i.e. policeman-woman becomes policemother) with some guidance from the teacher.

Parents and teachers (at least a nucleus) must want to break down sex-role stereotypes. Others in the setting must be worked with, individually and in groups, in order to deal with anxieties. It is important not to push beyond the individual parent's wishes for his/her child, but rather to aid in growth toward understanding and acceptance through reassurance. Respect needs to be shown for parents and children as individuals.

Settings for pre-school aged children are public or private, and not mandatory. Once children reach school age, the articulation needs to be made with teachers in that setting for children who have experiences described above. Meetings of parents with teachers and administrators can help to effect some degree of continuity for the children. Societal institutions are slow to change, and the effort must be made.

What of other pressures on children for conformity? Television exerts considerable pressure for sex-role stereotyping, in both programming and commercials. While elementary school age children and adolescents can be helped to analyze and evaluate these forces, the younger child needs to have counteracting experiences. It is especially important that the significant adults in the child's life accept the responsibility, while continuing to enlighten those in decision-making positions on television programming.

An additional pressure for conformity is the peer group. One girl, D., playing mother in a doll corner, with a boy, H., who starts to wash dishes, turns to him and says, "Daddies don't do that," and pushes him away from the sink. How does teacher (or in the home, parent or other adult) handle the situation? Or in another instance, one boy, S., turns to another boy, M., and says, "Why are you playing with that doll? That's for girls." Dealing sensitively, yet guiding to new understandings, with such instances when they appear is an

important part of the process of acceptance of differences.

In a society where traditionally held values are being questioned (i.e. religion,marriage), and alternative life styles are being attempted, it is understandable that the basic relations between men and women and their roles in society be re-examined. In this setting, it is essential that the socialization of children to these roles by formal means of education (school) and informal means (family, television) be evaluated. In Durkheim's words,

> "education...is above all the means by which society perpetually recreates the conditions of its very existence."[6]

In a stable society, maintenance of present values may understandably be expected to be transmitted by formal societal institutions, although one might question the advisability in eliminating flexibility even at those times. In our society which is rapidly undergoing multi-directional change, the resultant of which is still largely unknown, it is the responsibility of the educator to aid in preparing the young to develop coping mechanisms to deal with the unknown. Both men and women must have alternatives open to them for differing life styles so that they might successfully adapt to as well as change the course of events when needed. The teacher of young children ought, then, not inculcate any one set of life styles or "roles" for males and females, but ought to expose children to alternatives. Not all women ought necessarily to work in financially remunerative positions, but all women ought to have options to do so if they wish or have need. Not all men ought necessarily share in child rearing, but any who wish to do so ought to be encouraged.

Children should not be deprived of their unique qualities. All children should be exposed to various experiences and materials so that their <u>individual</u> interests and abilities might be realized and choices made without the strictures of what roles boys and girls should fill. It is all right to reassure D., the girl who refuses to let boy H. wash dishes in the doll corner because "Fathers

don't do that," that some fathers do indeed help with the kitchen chores, and that if D. wants to he may also have a turn. It is all right for D. to take care of her "baby," but it is also all right for her to build block structures with some boys. The removal of strictures is the first stage -- a support system must follow. Care must be taken, that in the removal of the stereotypes, new ones not be created in the swinging of the pendulum, causing sexism to remain with the discrimination on the opposite side. Parents have communicated to this author that their children were removed from private educational settings, perfectly satisfactory educationally, except for the fact that a new dimension had been added by some overly zealous parents who imposed, as they perceived it, a new sexist thrust which discriminated against their sons. Boys were being told that they must not play in the block corner at particular times, and must take a turn with sewing and doll corner play. While the parents' perceptions might be inaccurate, we do have a responsibility <u>not</u> to replace one kind of social control with another, but rather to create viable choices.

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